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**Making links between sex work, gender and victimisation:
The politics and pedagogies of John Schools**

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Making links between sex work, gender and victimisation:

The politics and pedagogies of John Schools

This article will explore the links between sex work, gender and victimisation. It will draw on the literature on victims and victimology as well as the literature on sex work to explore the ways in which sex work, gender and victimisation are presented at John Schools. These are court-diversion educational programmes that teach those arrested for soliciting for the purposes of buying sex the negative consequences of their actions and are currently operating in parts of the United States, Canada, United Kingdom and South Korea. Focusing on a case study of a John School in England, it shows how the pedagogies of the John School are inherently political and structured by the local and extra-local contexts in which it is situated. It also demonstrates the small but significant influence of radical feminist ideas and tropes in the John School and the ways in which the John School presents victimisation relationally as male clients causing hidden harms to victims most notably residents and female sex workers. Here the active construction of both the victim and offender identity is critically reflected on.

Keywords: sex work, gender, victimisation, John Schools, UK

Introduction

Some men looked devastated by the information they were being given. I will give them the benefit of the doubt and believe they really did not know that most women are drug-addicted, regularly raped, and have violent pimps on their backs. One man told me he would ‘never buy a woman again’. He thanked me for helping him ‘see the light’. Bindel (1998, 9)

In 1998 a new type of school opened in England: the John School. Operating out of an unmarked terrace house in Leeds, its pupils would be those caught ‘kerb crawling’ – that is, soliciting to buy sex from within, or in the vicinity of, a motor vehicle – in the city. At the John School, they would be informed of the negative consequences of their actions (*Modern Times: Paying for It* 1998; Campbell and Storr 2001). Led by

Julie Bindel, a radical feminist and then academic at Leeds Metropolitan University, together with Fiona Broadfoot, a former street sex worker, the school was available as an alternative to a public court appearance (and a fine if found guilty). The courts, prior to the opening of the John School, had been the solitary destination for those charged with kerb crawling since it was criminalised in England and Wales in 1985.

Officially titled the Kerb Crawling Rehabilitation Programme, it was heavily influenced by the series of John Schools that had opened in towns and cities in North America (John being the North American colloquialism for sex worker client). The San Francisco First Offender Prostitution Program in particular was influential and one of its organisers liaised closely with the organisers in Leeds helping to transfer the John School 'model'. The Leeds scheme would last less than two years, closing due to waning support from the police and schooling 80 men in the process (*Yorkshire Evening Post* 2000). Despite its closure, it stimulated interest in the John School model in other parts of England where 15 more John Schools had opened up by the end of 2012. Like the scheme in Leeds, these have also taken the form of an 'optional' court diversion programme aimed at people caught kerb crawling in the local area (usually within the boundaries of particular towns and cities). While most police forces in England do not operate John Schools and none exist at the time of writing in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, they remain an important and still 'mobile' method through which clients of sex workers are 'educated' and punished.

The purpose of this article is to examine the politics and pedagogies of John Schools, focusing on the ways in which they are underpinned by particular understandings of the relationship between sex work, gender and victimisation. It will build on the existing small body of work on John Schools (Monto 1998; Campbell and Storr 2001; Fischer *et al.* 2002; Wortley *et al.* 2002; Gibbs van Bruschot 2003;

Kennedy *et al.* 2004; Sanders 2008; Shivley *et al.* 2008; Lovell and Jordan 2012; Gurd and O'Brien 2013; Majic 2013) and bring these into dialogue with the wider literatures on sex work and victimisation. As there has been little empirical analysis of John Schools in England, it will draw on a research project examining the politics and pedagogies of John Schools in one English town. Methodologically, the project involved a triangulation of qualitative methods, notably documentary analysis of relevant policy documents and newspaper articles, participant observation at one session, and semi-structured interviews with five individuals – from the police, council and outreach services – who govern or work closely with the John School. The participant observation and interviews took place between December 2011 and January 2012. The interviews were recorded and transcribed while notes were taken at the session. The data was then coded with key themes drawn out and critically analysed. At the session attended, the names of those attending were not revealed to me and in this article the names of those interviewed will be anonymised and the town referred to as 'Redtown' as those interviewed requested anonymity.

Drawing on this research, the article will make three inter-related arguments. First, it will argue that it is not possible to make sense of the pedagogies of John Schools without understanding its politics and the local and extra-local contexts in which it is situated. Second, that the relationship between sex work, gender and victimisation at the Redtown John School is framed in part by radical feminist-inspired ideas and tropes but these are not adopted wholesale and run alongside other normative ideas about sex work. Third, that while sex workers are constructed as victims at the Redtown John School, they are not alone as they are positioned alongside a number of other victims, most prominently neighbouring residents. Their presentation as victims at the John School, however, is somewhat selective and

strategic, masking for instance the difference of opinions about the victim status of sex workers by those governing the scheme. In order to make these points, we will now explore the ways in which victims and victimisation have been understood and how these have been related to sex work and gender in the academic literature.

Following this, the article will then explore the politics and the pedagogies of the Redtown John School before concluding with a call for more research on John Schools and the links between sex work, gender and victimisation.

Victims and victimisation

When looking at early academic work on crime and deviance and the criminal justice system in the middle of the 20th Century, the victim is a peripheral figure at best. The focus was squarely on the offence and the offender. Today the picture is somewhat different with a growing body of academic work on the identity of the victim and the multiple experiences of victimisation. Victims have also become a more central figure in the criminal justice system, particularly in the Global North, whose needs and rights have become one of many focal points for public policy.

Much of the academic work on victims and victimisation has emerged in victimology. While it is regularly seen as a sub-discipline of criminology, it is a topic that has been widely discussed in other disciplines such as law, social policy, sociology and geography (the latter including work by Pain 1997; Valentine 1998 and Prior *et al.* 2013). A commonly used definition of a victim is taken from the 1985 United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power which defines a victim as somebody who has:

suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering,
economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts

or omissions that are in violation of criminal law operative within Member States (quoted in Goodey 2005, 10).

The declaration further notes that someone may be considered a victim irrespective of whether the offender is apprehended or convicted, and that a victim can also be an immediate family member or dependent of someone who has suffered harm. Despite the widespread use of this definition, debates continue inside and outside the academy over who is and who is not a victim. So, for instance, are those who have suffered from wrongs that are not in violation of the member state's criminal law victims? The UN definition would suggest not. Framing victims therefore is a political act, but the term victim is not universally welcomed (Leisenring 2006). Many feminists, for instance, prefer 'to use the term 'survivor' to try and capture women's resistance to their structural powerlessness and consequent potential victimization' (Walklate 2007a, 27, cf. Leisenring 2006). Echoing the wider literature on identity (e.g. Jenkins 2008; Lawler 2008) the victim is a socially constructed and contested identity (Green 2007).

The *process* of victimisation is a central focus of much of the victimological literature. It recognises that victims cannot be understood in isolation from the offence, the offender, the event and the aftermath, and the wider social, economic and political context. Such a stance is in large part a reaction to the foundational positivist work in victimology by von Hentig (1948), Mendelsohn (1963) and others that focused squarely on the victim, assessing their proneness to victimisation, their culpability and their lifestyles. Such a focus has been accused of 'victim-blaming' and critiqued for ignoring the embeddedness of victims in wider relations and contexts (Wolhuter *et al.* 2009). Recent work on victimisation, therefore, pays close attention to context and structural relations and, equally as importantly as this, the social

inequalities that underpin victimisation. A common message emanating from this work is that while everyone can potentially become a victim of crime, some people are more likely than others to be victimised. Likewise, the access to and experience of victim services are marked by social inequalities. The role of race, age, sexuality and gender and their intersectionalities in victimisation, therefore, has become a central focus of work in victimology (cf. Davies *et al.* 2007; Walklate 2007b; Wolhuter *et al.* 2009). As part of this, scholars have critically examined the provision of support services available to victims from the state and voluntary services (Mawby 2007; Williams and Goodman 2007), secondary victimisation (resulting from the insensitive treatment by the police and the criminal justice system), the selective provision of victim compensation (Wolhuter *et al.* 2009), and the participation of victims in criminal proceedings (Walklate 2007b; Wolhuter *et al.* 2009).

The role of gender within victimisation has become a central topic within victimology with a particular focus on the victimisation of women by men. This work has shown a frustration with existing victimisation studies, not only for ‘victim blaming’ but also for ignoring the gendered dimensions of victimisation, or when it is accounted for, resting their analyses on simplistic and stereotypical understandings of masculinity and femininity. While young men are frequently the most victimised group identified in victim surveys, women suffer disproportionately from some crimes (Davies 2011), most noticeably domestic violence and rape which are the subject of study for most feminist work on victimisation. This research has prised open the home and the family as places and institutions for critical analysis, given a voice to women who have experienced domestic violence and rape, and considered the interactions of female victims with the police, courts and welfare services (see, for instance, Lewis *et al.* 2000; Warrington 2001; Cook and Jones 2007; Hoyle 2007).

While work on gendered victimisation has foregrounded patriarchy as a system of inequality, it has also started to look at its intersection with other systems of inequality such as racism, classism, ageism and homophobia in structuring victimisation (Wolhuter *et al.* 2009; Davies 2011).

However, it is a mistake to think that there is a unifying feminist approach to victimisation (Davies 2007, 2011). As we shall see in the next section on sex work, gender and victimisation, there are a variety of feminist approaches to gendered victimisation with often dramatically contrasting theoretical, empirical and ontological views and agendas for social reform. Let us now turn to the relationship between gender, victimisation and sex work and the ways in which this relationship has been understood in the academic literature.

Sex work, gender and victimisation

For the criminologist Roger Matthews, women involved in prostitution, and street sex workers in particular, are subject to on-going and often traumatic victimisation:

Their victimisation is both extensive and continuous, particularly among those who work on the street. They are repeat victims and multiple victims...

Victimisation is... compounded, continuous and concentrated. It would be difficult to find a group who experience a greater and more diverse degree of victimisation than prostitutes. If the status of 'victim' is to have any meaning then street prostitutes, in particular, must qualify. (Matthews 2008, 59)

Drawing on a range of academic studies, Matthews lists a range of problems that many of those involved in prostitution encounter such as violence and coercion, drug use, mental and physical health problems and involvement in prostitution at an early age. Elsewhere Teela Sanders (2004) has shown how sex working on the streets in Birmingham (UK) often involves 'occupational hazards' such as intimidation and

harassment from nearby residents and the police as well as violence and theft from clients. Matthews and Sanders are not alone in making the connections between sex work and victimisation for a number of studies have critically examined the incidents and experiences of violence and other forms of victimisation in sex work. These have tended to concentrate on street sex work but have also examined indoor spaces such as brothels, massage parlours, hotel rooms and homes where sex work operates (cf. Church *et al.* 2001; Farley 2004; Kurtz *et al.* 2004; Kinnell 2008; O'Doherty 2011; Prior *et al.* 2013). Outside of academia, it is not uncommon nowadays to hear an academic, politician or activist frame sex workers as victims and list a multitude of problems associated with sex work. Yet, as we will now see, it is neither true to say that everyone views sex workers as victims, nor is it correct to say that there is universal agreement over the meaning of the term victim or the degree of victimisation involved in sex work.

A number of scholars have argued that while victimisation is certainly a significant and worrying issue within sex work, it is not an inherent part of sex work, and not every sex worker suffers from victimisation or the same forms of victimisation. O'Doherty (2011), for example, reasons that 'high end' sex workers who work indoors in Vancouver are less prone to victimisation than street sex workers. Taking this further, Prior *et al.* (2013) have argued that studies need to pay close attention to the geographies of victimisation in sex work. Analysing 'Ugly Mugs' reports of victimisation by sex workers in New South Wales, Australia, they show that while street-based sex workers experience higher rates of victimisation, the majority of instances actually occur in private spaces (such as cars) that are isolated, where offenders can conceal a weapon, and where sex workers have limited levels of

perceived or real control. Imagining a clean public-private dichotomy where private is safe and public is not safe is, therefore, problematic.

For radical feminists such as Pateman (1988), Jeffreys (1997, 2009), Farley (2004) and Barry (1995), victimisation is understood quite differently. They argue that prostitution is premised on the objectivising and commodification of women's bodies by men as well as male domination over women. These, it is argued, are forms of sexual violence in themselves. Victimisation, for radical feminists, is therefore inherent in prostitution. To support this viewpoint, radical feminist scholars make links between sex work and human trafficking and highlight incidents of coercion, rape, violence and abuse by men against what Jeffreys (1997) calls 'prostituted women' (see also Listerborn 2003). For Jeffreys (1997, 348), 'prostitution is form of brutal cruelty on the part of men that constitutes a violation of women's human rights, wherever and however it takes place'. Liberal feminists and others who highlight choice, empowerment, work and positive experiences for some sex workers as well as the need for workers' rights are dismissed by many radical feminists as being apologists and camouflage for patriarchal oppression (cf. Chapkis 1997; O'Neill 2001). As violence and victimisation is inherent to sex work according to radical feminists, they believe the only viable solution is to abolish the prostitution industry.

This viewpoint, however, has been heavily criticised (see, for instance, O'Neill 2001; Scoular 2004a; Weitzer 2012). For Weitzer (2012), the 'oppressionist paradigm' as espoused by radical feminists suffers from a number of faults. These include sensationalism; essentialising the experiences of sex workers with 'an exclusive focus on the negative' (11); overlooking male sex workers and female buyers; the lack of agency and 'passive victimhood' (12) attributed to all sex workers; and the conflation between sex work and trafficking. Sanders (2004) likewise is

critical of accounts that strip sex workers of agency and pay little attention to the ways in which sex workers employ safety strategies such as working in pairs outdoors or carrying implements that can be used as weapons.

With all this in mind, Weitzer (2012, 16) argues instead for a polymorphous understanding of sex work that focuses on the ‘constellation of occupational arrangements, power relations, and participants’ experiences’. ‘Victimisation, exploitation, agency, job-satisfaction, self-esteem, and other dimensions’, he continues, ‘should be treated as *variables* (not constants) that differ between types of sex work, geographical locations, and other structural conditions’ (*ibid*, 18, *emphasis in original*). While there are clear benefits of such an approach, the views of radical feminism have had a degree of influence in shaping attitudes about sex work by some politicians, policymakers and activists in parts of the Global North (Scoular 2004b; Oselin and Weitzer 2013). This is most pronounced in Sweden, Norway and Iceland where the selling of sex has been decriminalised while the buying of sex has been criminalised. In the case of the UK radical feminist ideas have had a degree of influence on sex work policy but significantly less so than in Sweden, Norway and Iceland. That said, the following case study of the Redtown John School will demonstrate that there are distinct echoes of radical feminism in its politics and pedagogies and its understanding of the relationship between sex work, gender and victimisation. However, radical feminism is not drawn on wholesale or in isolation.

The politics behind the Redtown John School

Kerb crawling was made illegal in England and Wales as part of the Sexual Offences Act 1985. It was defined in gender-specific terms as a man soliciting a woman for the purposes of prostitution from, or within the vicinity, of a motor vehicle. It would only

be a criminal offence if conducted persistently (a term never defined) and ‘in such manner or in such circumstances as to be likely to cause annoyance to the woman (or any of the women) solicited, or nuisance to other persons in the neighbourhood’ (as defined in the Sexual Offences Act 1985). In the years that have followed, the criminalisation of kerb crawling has intensified as it has become an arrestable offence and the courts have been given new powers to take away the driving licence of the offender. As part of the Policing and Crime Act 2009 the legal status of kerb crawling morphed yet again as it was subsumed with the wider offence of soliciting.

Furthermore, the 2009 Act, which was written in a new ‘gender neutral’ language, specified that the police no longer needed to prove persistence by the offender and that it is an offence to purchase sex from somebody subject to force, threats, coercion or deception from a third party (Brooks-Gordon 2010). However, unlike Sweden, Norway and Iceland, the buying of sex from somebody who is not subject to force, threats, coercion or deception from a third party remains legal in England and Wales.

Looking back on the introduction of the 1985 Act, notions of victimisation underpinned its introduction but in very different ways from the radical feminist linkage of victimisation and sex work outlined above. For the Conservative MP, Janet Fookes, whose Private Member’s Bill was the basis of the Act, the Act would address ‘the unhappiness and distress caused to ordinary women who do not want to be approached... in streets where, over the years, residents have been increasingly plagued by the activities of prostitutes’ (quoted in Wooster 1985, 7). The victims in Fookes’ view were residents and in particular ‘ordinary’ women who were misrecognised as street sex workers and propositioned (cf. Koskela and Tani 2005).

For Fookes, like many of her contemporaries in the Houses of Parliament, sex workers were seen as offenders. As Kantola and Squires (2004) reason, they were,

and in many cases continue to be, seen as a public nuisance problem whose behaviour is discomforting for onlookers and out-of-place in public space. The kerb crawlers – male in almost every instance – were also framed as a public nuisance problem. That is, nuisances in themselves but also catalysts encouraging other public nuisance (as their ‘demand’ was seen to fuel the ‘supply’ of sex workers on the streets). The 1985 Act and subsequent changes in the law have been justified as ‘equalising’ the gender imbalance in the law where only the (female) street sex worker was arrested and sent to court (most commonly for soliciting and loitering) with the (male) client avoiding such punishments. However, as we will see, recent changes in the law (most noticeably in the Policing and Crime Act 2009) and police attitudes to sex work have been underpinned by a belief that sex workers are both offenders and victims.

The increasing criminalisation of clients in national policy has had implications for the policing of sex work in Redtown, a mid-sized deindustrialising town in England that has a long but largely unwritten history of indoor and outdoor prostitution markets. Echoing enforcement strategies elsewhere in England and Wales, the policing of sex work in Redtown has overwhelmingly concentrated on the *outdoor* spaces of sex work (Sanders 2005; Hubbard 2006). In particular the Redtown police have focused on the two industrial estates adjacent to the town centre where street sex work is clustered. The 1985 Act and subsequent changes in the law provided the Redtown police and courts with technologies for targeting kerb crawlers but, in general, the policing of kerb crawling and sex work has taken the form of short, *ad hoc* ‘crackdowns’ alongside longer periods of relative tolerance by the Redtown police. This, as Hubbard (2006) suggests, is a familiar pattern to the localised policing of sex work in the UK. Until relatively recently, the primary focus of the Redtown police was on spatially containing the buying and selling of sex in the

red light districts. At the same time, they sought to discourage it from taking place in a working class residential area, anonymised here as Northside, which is adjacent to one of the red light districts and where sex work would occasionally ‘spill over’ into.

Fuelled by a concern about the health, safety and wellbeing of sex workers in the town a new outreach project was set up in the early 2000s. Still in place at the time of writing, it is delivered by a local voluntary organisation and funded predominately by the town council. It seeks to support and exit women from street prostitution with a particular emphasis on exiting (interviews, outreach officials #1 and #2). This is attempted through the provision of advice and support on a range of issues including health care, drugs and alcohol, employment, welfare and housing. The organisation also offers a comfortable and safe venue in one of the red light districts where sex workers can relax and socialise during the night. Following the Policing and Crime Act 2009, the project began delivering Engagement and Support Orders (ESOs) given out by the courts to street sex workers who have been caught loitering or soliciting on two or more occasions over a three-month period. ESOs require sex workers to attend three meetings with a court-appointed supervisor in order to plan their exit from prostitution – a form of what Sanders (2012) calls ‘forced welfare’.

Following a petition (with over 2,000 names on) orchestrated by a group of Northside residents that demanded a ‘zero tolerance approach’ to kerb crawlers as well as provisional plans by the town council to ‘clean up’ the industrial estates for new investment, the police devised and implemented a new prostitution strategy in 2007. It is still in operation at the time of writing and focuses on regular surveillance of the red light districts and the surrounding areas, arresting kerb crawlers and sending those arrested for the first time to a John School session, and ‘help through

hassle' towards sex workers using cautions, arrests and ESOs. Behind the new strategy is a changing understanding of the causes of prostitution and the culpability of those involved. Here, street sex workers are seen as being either forced into prostitution or suffering from an expensive drug addiction that requires substantial financing. Echoing radical feminist thought, clients are seen to be fuelling a demand that encourages women to enter and not exit prostitution. Stopping the demand would, so the logic goes, stop the supply. The clients are also viewed as being fully culpable for their actions because they could have chosen not to offend whereas sex workers were seen as having comparatively limited culpability as their situation means that desisting is more difficult. Targeting the clients was therefore seen as being a justifiable means to an end.

During the interviews conducted with those governing the scheme, the clients were uniformly presented as offenders. While the interviewees noted that they were unsure why the clients sought to buy sex, clients were frequently positioned as destructive, selfish, irresponsible and ultimately naïve individuals who lacked any understanding of the negative consequences of their actions. This echoes Monto's (1998, 508) analysis of the Portland John Schools which 'relies on the belief that many of the men who solicit prostitution are not primarily malicious but misinformed', as well as Gurd and O'Brien's (2013, 156) view that the John Schools in Fresno, San Diego and San Francisco construct clients as 'ignorant or uneducated on the issue'. In contrast, sex workers were viewed by the interviewees as victims whose dire circumstances are worsened and elongated by clients. For example, one outreach worker (#1) interviewed stated that:

[Buying sex] is not acceptable. It is unacceptable not because we are snobs and because we are making judgement, but [because...] a woman should not be raped, because in essence on many occasions that is what it is. They might part

with some money but if you asked the women when they were not needing drugs ‘would you go with men?’ No. So in a funny sort of way, it is against their will. It is just that they had to give into that to get the money to pay for the drugs. No drugs; no work. We are a civilised society; we cannot stand by while women are exploited in that way.

The viewing of prostitution as rape, coercion and gendered exploitation here strongly echoes the radical feminism standpoint. Yet unlike radical feminism where sex workers are unequivocally victims, the police officers in Redtown interviewed, however, presented sex workers as victim-offender hybrids in the interviews conducted. On the one hand, they were seen as people with troubled lives (e.g. suffering from drug dependency) and histories (e.g. time spent in care homes, experiences of sexual abuse). On the other hand, the sex workers were seen to cause a public nuisance with their actions also in violation of the law in England and Wales. This echoes Matthews (2008, 58) argument that adult sex workers are rarely seen as ‘ideal victims’. Here Matthews draws on Christie’s (1986) notion of the ideal victim who is weak, vulnerable, respectable and not culpable for the offence. Yet the widely perceived position of sex workers ‘in the ‘grey economy’, their marginalised status, their reportedly high earnings, and lack of social and economic contribution to the community disqualifies them in eyes of many observers from claiming the status of ‘legitimate’ or ‘ideal’ victims’ (Matthews 2008, 58). Importantly also, all of the interviewees noted that the vocal residents of Northside saw both sex workers and kerb crawlers as (public nuisance) offenders and would dismiss any notion that sex workers were victims. So while there is more of a consensus on the naïve but deviant identity of the client in Redtown, there is less of a consensus over the victimhood of sex workers. However, as we will see in the next section on the pedagogies of the Redtown John School, sex workers are presented (for the most part) as unquestionable

victims to the attending clients in the audience.

The pedagogies of the Redtown John School

Beginning in 2007, those arrested for kerb crawling for the first time in Redtown are given the option to attend one John School session. It is held in the central police station in Redtown and by the end of 2011 twenty sessions have taken place ‘educating’ over two hundred men in the process. The John School is governed by senior members of the police, council and the aforementioned outreach organisation, with a police inspector taking the overall lead. The ‘awareness session’ as it is usually known takes a didactic educational format which, like John Schools elsewhere, focuses on showing the ‘harms’ and ‘victims’ that kerb crawling supposedly creates and perpetuates (Monto 1998; Fischer *et al.* 2002). The rationale behind the John School was explained by one police officer (#1) interviewed:

The people who did the petition said ‘we want the kerb crawlers – no ifs, no buts – taken straight to court and named and shamed’. And while it is important to respond to what the community wants, at the same time we thought if we did that, we would have lost the opportunity to sit down with those people [the kerb crawlers] and explain a different reality of street prostitution, because they would have gone to court, got fined and gone back out.

This quote speaks to an underlying belief of many John Schools that as kerb crawlers were seen as making a conscious but ill-informed decision to buy sex, educating them about the wrongs and harms of kerb crawling and buying sex could, or should, discourage them from re-offending. So while the different members governing the John Schools did not necessarily agree on the extent of the victimhood of the sex workers, they all believed that the John School would help them to abolish outdoor sex work in the town.

Each session at the Redtown John School lasts between one and two hours. Unlike several other John Schools in the UK and elsewhere, there is no attendance fee as this may discourage some people from attending. However, in common with John Schools elsewhere, the Redtown John School is structured around presentations by selected 'community stakeholders'. In Redtown, each presentation takes the style of a short lecture to the attendees with little or no interaction with the audience. The speakers are a police representative, a community safety manager and a social worker from the council, and a representative of the outreach organisation. It was felt that they should not follow John Schools elsewhere that include the victims as speakers such as a resident, ex-sex worker or, in the case of the Leeds programme, a relative of a deceased sex worker. For a police officer interviewed (#1), this would be too confrontational or potentially dangerous (cf. Fischer *et al.* 2002; Monto 1998; Majic 2013). Instead it was decided that the organisers would speak 'on their behalf' as they had regular interaction with these groups.

Much of the teaching at the Redtown John School is based on ontological juxtapositions where the 'myths', 'fantasies' and 'illusions' of the clients were noted and dismissed while the 'realities' that the presenters see and hear about in their job are highlighted and cemented as fact. Indeed, the use of the word 'reality' has been regularly used in the media surrounding the Redtown John School and John Schools elsewhere, often accompanied by negative adjectives such as 'grim', 'bleak' or 'harsh'. Notions that prostitution is glamorous, that sex workers chose the profession, that sex workers enjoy their work and like their clients are dismissed at the Redtown John School session. As is the view that it is 'just a monetary transaction between the man and a woman' (interview, council official). In their place, the 'reality' is asserted where sex work is unglamorous; sex workers are often coerced through pimps, family

members or the need to buy drugs; sex workers dislike their work and clients (even if they say otherwise); and buying sex has negative ramifications for the sex worker and other people as well.

As part of the outlining of the ‘reality’ of sex work, a number of victims are presented. The central victims are the sex workers and the residents of Northside, with the client, his partner and family, and the wider town as well also framed as victims. Victimisation, at the Redtown John School, is both social and spatial. As with the session, we shall now focus on the clients first. They are portrayed as being offender/victim hybrids but offenders first and foremost at the session. Their actions are presented as being both ‘legally and morally wrong’ – a phrase used in the letter from the police that every person caught kerb crawling in Redtown receives immediately after their arrest. Nevertheless, they are presented as being victims of sorts (without the use of the term) by the police representative who opens the John School by focusing on the legal and social problems kerb crawlers inflict on themselves by getting caught. Here they are victims *solely of their own making*; they have been arrested because of their actions and made to attend the John School. As with John Schools elsewhere, they are told that they ‘have been given a merciful ‘break’ for their harmful and immoral behaviour’ (Fischer *et al.* 2002, 394), but should they re-offend, they will be severely punished. In outlining this message the police representative in Redtown outlines the illegal status of kerb crawling and the sustained police operations to ‘catch’ kerb crawlers and the strong likelihood of being caught. As a police official (#2) who occasionally speaks at the session exclaimed in an interview:

I talk about how much I enjoy going out and locking people up, how much my team go out and enjoy locking people up. The reality is that we enjoy doing our

job... and we do it well. So if you go back and reoffend, we will be there and we will be arresting you, and this is what will happen to you.

The centrepiece of the presentation by the police representative is the holding up of a front page of the local newspaper. On this page the first person to be arrested for kerb crawling having already attended one of the Redtown sessions is 'named and shamed'. Details of his subsequent court appearance, fine and driving ban are read out by the presenter who then warns those listening not to re-offend as 'there is no second chance... you will go to court, you will be fair game to the press... we tell them and you will be named and shamed' (quote from session attended). On top of this, the partners and families of the client are highlighted as victims of the deceptive, adulterous behaviour of the client and framed as potential victims should the client reoffend and be named and shamed in the newspaper.

Following this, speakers from the outreach project and the council's social services department concentrate on presenting the (street) sex work as a victim. For one of the police officials (#1) interviewed, their job is 'to explain to them [the attendees] what life is really like as a street prostitute in case they have got any romantic Julia Roberts ideas in their heads' (making reference to Julia Roberts' role as a sex worker in the film *Pretty Woman*). They seek to deglamourise sex work and the sex worker and reveal their 'true' identities and experiences. Here the sex worker is presented as an unequivocal victim, with the views held by the police officials that sex workers are victim-offender hybrids not mentioned. The outreach representative reads one or two poems from a collection of poems written by sex workers who work, or have worked, in the town. The themes of the poems range from experiences of physical abuse to their negative attitudes towards clients and pimps. A short film is then shown by the social services representative. The film consists of an interview

with an anonymised ex-sex worker in the town who was forced into street sex work at a young age in order to pay for her father's drug addiction. Combined, the speakers highlight the extensive and continuous, mental and physical suffering and exploitation of sex workers whose victimisation is sustained and heightened by the clients. In the session observed, for example, the social worker told the attendees that 'you are destroying a little bit more of her soul'.

The residents of Redtown are then presented as victims of the clients, this time by the council's community safety representative. When interviewed the representative said that they usually hold the petition aloft at the session while proclaiming to the audience

... well, I haven't made this up, it has two thousand signatures on that and not one of them says Mickey Mouse. They are real people who put their addresses. And some of the Mosques supported it.

This is then followed up by giving each attendee four letters, each written by a different, invited and anonymised resident of Northside. In the words of the speaker at the observed session, the letters 'show what it is like to live in a community blighted by prostitution'. They are told to carefully read each of the letters in the session. Echoing the discourses of public nuisance discussed earlier, the letters use emotive language to highlight the distress caused by the presence and out-of-placeness of sexual practice and detritus (e.g. discarded condoms and tissues) in the red light district and in Northside in particular (cf. Cresswell 1996; Cook and Whowell 2011). Northside is represented in one letter as becoming a 'hell-hole' while in another it is 'an abyss'.

Both adults and children are described in the letters as being fearful and having their mobility in the public areas of the neighbourhood restricting by the

intimidating presence of kerb crawlers (cf. O'Neill *et al.* 2008; Pitcher *et al.* 2008). Some letters talk about their experience of being solicited for sex by sex workers or clients, and one argues that clients have 'taken away the innocence' of children living in the neighbourhood. The letters present the clients as Pied Piper-like characters whose money has encouraged sex workers and, in turn, drug dealers and other drug users to locate in the neighbourhood. The letters do not present sex workers as victims but as offenders, although the primary focus is on the clients who are framed as chief victimisers and the root cause of the social decline of the neighbourhood. The clients, sex workers, drug dealers and drug users are not presented as bad residents or bad neighbours but as bad Outsiders whose fleeting and out-of-place visits are not welcome (cf. Painter 2012). Together, the letters and the speaker stress and reinforce 'a moral geography' in which sex work and drug use 'is deemed incompatible with family occupation' (Hubbard and Prior 2013, 145).

In a more abstract way, Redtown is also framed as a victim by the community safety representative. Here the clients are presented as disrupting the town's aspirations for civility and economic development. Indeed, such notions echo an on-going concern of figures in the town council who fear that the sight and presence of sex work in the red light district gives the district and town a poor reputation, discouraging inward investment (interview, council official). The framing of sex work as a bulwark to economic development speaks to a widespread concern in contemporary urban governance about the 'need' to beautify the public space of cities in order to attract apprehensive and demanding inward investors (Mitchell 2003; Cook and Whowell 2011). With these issues in mind, the community safety representative demanded at the session I observed that those in attendance become

responsible and respectful citizens and visitors who ‘join in with this aspiration for the town’.

While the messages of victimisation supposedly speak to a more complicated, hidden ‘reality’, they are somewhat straightforward stories. For one police officer (#1) interviewed, this is a deliberate strategy:

I guess, being quite blunt, if you have got people in there who aren’t very bright, there is no point using big words or doing big lectures and doing them all day, because you’ll just lose their attention. So you’ve got to make it reasonably quick, you’ve got to make it simple and you have got to make it meaningful.

The council official interviewed also spoke of the need to use ‘hard-hitting’ stories that ‘hit home’. While the juxtaposing of ‘illusions’ with ‘reality’ at the John School may encourage some behavioural change of the attendees (cf. Shivley *et al.* 2008; Lovell and Jordan 2012), it is important to note that the messages provided are somewhat selective, focusing on particular spaces, identities and experiences. Indeed, the session only looks at street sex work, never mentioning the indoor spaces in which sex work is performed in Redtown and largely unpoliced. Yet the impression given at the John School is that that prostitution is solely street-based and that presenters are reflecting on the experiences of all sex workers in Redtown and often sex workers in general (i.e. everywhere). Reading behind the lines, it seems the presenters deem it necessary to silence the presence of indoor sex work and sex workers in order to avoid giving the impression that alternative venues exist where they can buy sex with limited or no police attention.

Further selectivity is evident in the exclusive focus on the negative experiences of both sex workers and residents. Stylistically, the Redtown John School shares much in common with the presentation of sex work by radical feminists when

it frames the ‘reality’ of all sex workers as continually harrowing and exploitative. Likewise, the residents in Northside are presented as being constantly affected and offended by the presence of sex work and kerb crawling in the neighbourhood and that they are universally opposed to such activities. Echoing the ways in ‘the community’ and ‘the neighbourhood’ are often framed in the definite singular form, the identities, experiences and politics of the Northside residents are presented as being remarkably coherent, masking any current or potentially positive views or indifference about the presence of sex work, kerb crawling and drug dealing (cf. England 2011; Pitcher *et al.* 2008). Such accounts of victimisation within sex work that prioritise simplicity and universalism pay too little attention to subtly, nuance and variegated identities, beliefs and experiences – and a focus on these would provide clients with a better understanding of sex work and its socio-spatial relations (Sanders 2008, 2009; Majic 2013).

Conclusion

Referring back to its title, this article has explored the *making* of connections between sex work, gender and victimisation. It has shown that while victimisation clearly exists in (and out of) sex work and that it is heavily gendered, it is important to cast a critical eye on the *public presentation* of these connections at venues such as John Schools.

The anonymised case study of the Redtown John School provides three key findings. First, echoing Thiem’s (2009) understandings of the geographies of education, it is impossible to understand the pedagogies of John Schools without exploring their politics and the wider contexts in which they are situated. John Schools are inherently political with their pedagogies influenced not only by the

beliefs and experiences of the governors and speakers but also by a shared desire to present a ‘reality’ that discourages clients from re-offending. The precise form of didactic education used at John Schools is also contingently structured by the local and extra-local politics and laws in which they are situated and also by notions of ‘good practice’ and what is successful and transferable from other John Schools.

Echoing Majic (2013) and Monto’s (1998) respective case studies of the John Schools in San Francisco and Portland, the second finding from this study is that a number of radical feminist-inspired ideas and tropes have influenced the content of Redtown John School (such as the portrayal of sex work as a form of violence and victimisation by men against women) and the motivations for the School (that targeting the demand could stop prostitution). Nevertheless, radical feminist ideas are not universally accepted by all of the governors of the Redtown scheme (most noticeably the police) and these are not reflected in current laws in England and Wales where sex workers continue to be criminalised, albeit alongside the clients.

The third finding is that the identity of the victim and the processes of victimisation at the Redtown John School are presented as being *relational* whereby the naïve but deviant client offender harms a number of victims. Such findings resonate with Fischer *et al.*’s (2002, 396) earlier account of the Toronto John School Diversion Programme where

its central message... [is] that prostitution causes a great variety of ‘victims’ and ‘harms’ – all of which are caused by the ‘John’ and his selfish, immoral behaviour. The ‘John’ is cast as a fundamentally irresponsible citizen who is unable to control his sexual urges.

Victims and offenders are on the whole neatly categorised and separated with the primary victims at the Redtown John School identified as sex workers and residents,

echoing the findings of studies of North American John Schools (Fischer *et al.* 2002; Majic 2013; Monto 1998; Wortley *et al.* 2002; Gurd and O'Brien 2012).

Victimisation is presented here as a social and spatial process at the Redtown John School, affecting places and people (predominately women but also male and youth residents). The presentation of the sex worker as a victim is particularly noteworthy as for the most part, they are, like residents, portrayed as being vulnerable, non-culpable and locked-in to their poor quality-of-life due to the immoral and illegal behaviours of the clients. But in doing so their identities and experiences are essentialised and negativity is universalised. Indeed, behind these universal claims is a somewhat hazy geographical imagination where the experience of some outdoor sex workers in Redtown are implicitly and explicitly presented as being the experience of *all* sex workers in Redtown and beyond. Presenting the sex work as a victim at the John School also masks the ways in which the police perceive sex workers as victim-offender hybrids. Overall, the framing of victims and offenders at the John School speaks to Lawler's (2008, 7, emphasis in original) notion that identity is 'profoundly social... [it] is not foundational and essential, but something *produced* by the narratives people use'. It is 'creative work' (*ibid*, 145) which as Jenkins (2008, 46) points out is 'a practical accomplishment, a process'.

More work, of course, needs to be done on the complex and contingent links between sex work, gender and victimisation and, in particular, on the ways in which these links are articulated, drawn on, politicised, circulated and disputed. While more research is needed in England, where this study has focused on, comparative work is also needed in countries elsewhere from Sweden to Vietnam, the Netherlands to South Africa. Further work is also needed on John Schools. Indeed, more work is required to examine how John Schools are experienced by the clients attending, how

they internalise such messages linking sex work, gender and victimisation together, and how this influences their lives, attitudes and relationships afterwards – important issues that have yet to be researched in-depth.

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